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OTTERBEIN

AND THE

REFORMED CHURCH.

BY REV. J. H. DUBBS, D. D.

THE Reverend William Otterbein, an eminent minister of the Reformed Church, has been generally claimed as the founder of the religious denomination known as the "United Brethren in Christ." In support of this claim statements have been made which reflect seriously on the history and character of the Reformed Church. It has, for instance, been confidently asserted that, in consequence of his extraordinary piety, Otterbein was grievously persecuted and driven into schism.* While we do not deny his active participation in a religious movement, originally confined to the Reformed Church, but subsequently extending beyond its limits, which finally resulted in the organization of a separate religious denomination, we think it can be shown that Otterbein was a faithful member of the Reformed Coetus (or Synod); that he possessed the confidence of his brethren; and that he never proposed to sever his connection with the church of his fathers. This subject has been frequently discussed, but the recent discovery of important documents renders it worthy of renewed attention.

William Otterbein was born June 3d, 1726, at Dillenburg, in Nassau, where his father was rector of the Latin school. In baptism he was named "Philip William," but for some unknown reason he dropped the first of these names in later life. His father and grandfather were Reformed ministers, and five of his brothers also assumed the sacred office. Concerning his

* See Hanby, in Rupp's "Hist of Rel. Denominations," *et al.*

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early youth we have little knowledge ; but it is certain that he enjoyed the priceless blessing of a Christian home. In 1742 we find him studying at Herborn, an institution which was then attended by many students of theology. In 1748 he was recognized as a Candidate of Theology, at Dillenburg, and was in the same year a teacher at Herborn. One year later he was ordained, and became vicar of the church at Ockersdorf.

When Schlatter visited Europe, Otterbein was but twenty-six years old ; but he was full of missionary 'enthusiasm, and joined the band of six young ministers who heeded the call to labor in America. Immediately on his arrival in this country, in 1752, he was called to the pastorate of the church of Lancaster, which was then, next to Philadelphia, the most important Reformed congregation in Pennsylvania. His immediate predecessors, Vock and Schnorr, appear to have been unworthy men, who had left the congregation rent and distracted. Neither of them had brought testimonials from Germany, and the latter seems to have been an unordained pretender ; but the lack of ministers was so great that people were easily deceived, and were only too ready to take their own way without consulting coetus. Some of the best members had therefore withdrawn from the congregation, while others had become so demoralized that they were unwilling to submit to proper ecclesiastical discipline.*

In assuming the charge of such a congregation, Otterbein undertook a difficult task ; but he appears to have been very successful, though he evidently met with occasional discouragements. During his ministry a church was erected which remained standing until 1853. Dr. Harbaugh gives him the credit of imparting to the congregation "consolidation, firmness, and character," and in the minutes of coetus for 1757 he is called "a most excellent pastor."

In the latter year he expressed a wish to resign, complaining especially of a lack of discipline in the congregation ; but the coetus declined to dissolve the pastoral relation. The people

* See Letter of Rev. J. B. Rieger, in Saur's Paper, 1751.

were also unwilling to give him up, and personally signed a document, which is still extant, in which they pledged themselves to submit to proper discipline in the observance of the Lord's Supper. He therefore withdrew his resignation and continued his pastoral labors.

Besides preaching regularly in Lancaster and New Providence, Otterbein was, in 1755, appointed a member of two committees of supply, which rendered it necessary for him to preach in Reading and in Conewago (now Christ church, Adams county), as long as these churches remained vacant. In the following year he was directed to supply the charge, in York county, made vacant by the deposition of Rev. Jacob Lischy. It was in the performance of these duties that he engaged in the "itinerant labors" to which he referred in his old age as having been undertaken while he was pastor in Lancaster; but it should be remembered that all this was done at the direction of the authorities of the Church. In 1757 he was elected President of Coetus.

One year later, in 1758, Otterbein left Lancaster, it would seem, rather abruptly. He had intended to visit his friends in Europe, but was prevented, it is said, by a war which was then raging. Steiner, however, in his reply to a letter received from Otterbein—reproving him for irregularly accepting a call from Philadelphia—says rather sharply: "If I were to make myself a judge of your conduct I would say: 'Your departure from Lancaster, and your delay in making your proposed journey to the Fatherland do not please me.' . . . But as I do not know your private motives, I cannot presume to judge."*

From 1758 to 1760, Otterbein was pastor at Tulpehocken. During this period he received the usual Holland stipend, the first year £30, and the second £37 10s. He is said, in the minutes of coetus, to have labored "with a blessing." In 1759 he declined a call to Frederick, Maryland, partly in deference to the wishes of the people of Tulpehocken, and partly because he still expected to visit his friends in Germany. Early

* *Mayer MSS.*, I., 114.

in 1760 a letter was addressed by the coetus to the Synod of Holland, in which the following passage appears: "We announce with pleasure that Domine Otterbein has determined to remain longer with us. He still labors with great energy and success in Tulpehocken. Occasionally he makes a journey to Fredericktown, in Maryland, in order to keep together the sheep who were left without a shepherd by Domine Steiner, and to feed them with the word of God."

The call from Frederick was renewed later in the same year, and the coetus then declared it advisable that he should accept it "on account of the isolated position of that church."

In obedience to this judgment Otterbein removed to Frederick, where he remained five years. Here, as elsewhere, the church prospered under his care. A church and parsonage were erected, which in their day were regarded as buildings of a very superior order. There are traditions of conflicts, but they do not appear to be sustained by reliable evidence. It is probable, indeed, that in erecting a church and a parsonage within five years, he encountered some opposition; but the fact that in 1761 he declined an urgent call from the church of Reading indicates that he was at that time satisfied with his charge. In 1763 he received a call from the Reformed Church of Philadelphia and was requested by coetus to become its pastor. This call he retained for a long time, and was evidently inclined to accept it, but there was some opposition to his coming "because his voice was weak."* When he finally declined, Dr. Weyberg was chosen pastor.

On the 19th of April, 1762, Mr. Otterbein was married in Lancaster, Pa., to Miss Susan Le Roy. She was probably a daughter, or grand-daughter, of Jean Jacques Le Roy, an Indian trader who was killed by the savages at Mahoning in 1755, and whose family subsequently resided in Lancaster.† The fact that Otterbein had at this time reached the mature age of thirty-six lends color to the rather coarse statement contained

* Mayer MSS.

† Rupp's "History of Lancaster County," p. 354.

in a letter addressed by the church at Amwell, New Jersey, to the Synods of Holland, in the same year, that "Domine Otterbein has entered the state of matrimony in deference to public opinion, which in America requires that a minister should be a married man." We know nothing further concerning Otterbein's domestic relations, except that his wife died April 27th, 1768, aged 32 years and 5 months.* He remained a widower for the rest of his life. In the "Holland Report" for 1773 the "Fathers" say: "We are all married men, except Domine Otterbein, and most of us are blessed with children."

From 1765 to 1774 Otterbein was pastor of the Reformed Church of York, Pennsylvania. In 1770 and 1771 he was absent on a visit to his relatives in Germany, but his people would not give him up, and the church was supplied, at their request, by the members of coetus.†

We are inclined to doubt the stories which are related concerning the "big meetings" which Otterbein is said to have conducted at this early period. He was no doubt more inclined to "Pietism" than some of his brethren, though not to such an extent as to come into conflict with them; and it is, of course, possible that he may occasionally have participated in "union meetings," but it accords better with ascertained facts to believe that those meetings which have become historical occurred somewhat later than has been hitherto supposed. Tradition is almost sure to antedate events.

In 1774 Otterbein received a call from the Second Reformed Church of the City of Baltimore. As this may properly be regarded as the turning-point in his career, it becomes necessary to go back a few years to consider the circumstances which led to this event.

The Reformed Church of Baltimore was founded at least as early as 1750. For some years it appears to have been irregularly supplied, but in 1757 the Rev. John Christopher Faber

* Records of the Reformed Church of Lancaster.

† Minutes of Coetus, 1770.

was elected pastor. He was a man of some culture, but his preaching was not acceptable, and it was asserted by his opponents that he lacked an earnest appreciation of the character of his office. Another ground of objection, according to a statement subsequently entered by Otterbein on the records of his congregation, was found in the fact that he was not a member of coetus. In 1770, Faber's unpopularity became so great that a large portion of the congregation demanded his resignation or removal. This party was greatly pleased with the earnest and enthusiastic preaching of a man named Benedict Schwob, Schwope, or Swope,* who resided somewhere in the neighborhood of Baltimore. The latter had already applied for ordination to the Reformed Coetus, and it seems likely that he had occasionally occupied the pulpit of the church in Baltimore.

Of the early life of Mr. Schwope little is known. Dr. Harbaugh and other writers, on the authority, apparently, of Mr. Asbury, call him "a young minister recently arrived from Germany;" but this is a mistake. No doubt he was a native of Germany, but the records of St. Benjamin's Church, near Westminster, Maryland, show that he was, as early as 1763, a ruling elder of that congregation. It appears from his extant manuscript that he was very imperfectly educated. In those days it was not unusual for ruling elders to instruct the congregation in the absence of a regular pastor; and it was probably while laboring in this capacity that Mr. Schwope manifested the oratorical talent which subsequently enabled him to become a very popular preacher. In Baltimore, many of the Reformed people were delighted with his discourses, contrasting them with those of Mr. Faber, which they declared to be cold and heartless. An effort was accordingly made to displace Mr. Faber, but it turned out that he had more friends than had been supposed, and the effort proved a failure. Then the dissatisfied party withdrew, and built a small church, of which Mr.

* The name was variously written, even by its owner. No doubt it was originally *Schwab*.

Schwop became pastor, though as yet he had not received ordination. Neither party, however, regarded the separation as permanent, and, by mutual consent, the whole matter was referred to the coetus for adjudication. Simultaneously Mr. Schwop renewed his application for ordination, and we find the following action on the minutes of the coetus held in Philadelphia in 1770 :

“Mr. Schwop, who had been previously examined at the Coetus of Germantown, applied to Coetus for ordination, and offered to submit to another examination. The reasons for his application were considered, and it was resolved, by a majority of votes, that after his difficulties have been investigated he shall be ordained, as soon as possible after an examination by Domines Pomp and Hendel ; provided that the commissioners appointed for the investigation of his difficulties, Domines Gross and Gobrecht, offer no objections, and regard it as advisable in consequence of the circumstances of the county and of the churches. The want of faithful teachers, especially in Maryland, induces us to accept as our brother every one who may become a worthy instrument in building up and advancing the kingdom of God. We hope this of Mr. Schwop, and therefore trust that the Reverend Fathers will not be surprised at our action, but will rather approve it, especially as we seek nothing thereby but the salvation of souls and the honor of our God.”

On another page of the same minutes we find the following account of the manner in which the difficulties in the church of Baltimore were brought to the attention of the coetus :

“Two members of the church in Baltimore, on their own responsibility, presented various complaints against Mr. Faber, to the following effect:—that Mr. Faber is neither sufficiently serious in his conduct, nor sufficiently earnest and zealous in his official functions. On the other hand, Mr. Faber brought several charges against the complainants, and also against Mr. Schwop (a man who preaches in that neighborhood), for having caused disturbance in his congregation. It was therefore resolved, that inasmuch as these ministers have submitted to the judgment of coetus without being members thereof, the matter be taken into consideration, and the complaints and defences of both parties be considered. As the coetus was unable minutely to understand the course which affairs had taken, and inasmuch as both parties claimed to be able to produce witnesses, Domines Gros and Gobrecht were directed to visit these congregations, to examine the case minutely, to decide according to their best judgment, and to report to coetus.”

The members of coetus appear to have been very desirous that Mr. Schwope should be ordained. This appears from a letter *ad interim* addressed to the Fathers in Holland on the 7th of December, 1770, of which the following is an extract:

"The deputies sent to Maryland, Domines Gobrecht and Gros, offer a preliminary report, that Mr. Schwop appears to them in many respects worthy of recommendation, that he manifests extraordinary talents, and that, so far as they can find out, he is innocent of the crimes of injustice and dishonesty charged against him. Concerning the charge of sectarianism, nothing certain could be discovered; but, on the contrary, there are many proofs of his innocence and piety. In the meantime the deputies are of the opinion that the case should be considered, and that preliminary information should be given to your honors, so that we may take no action in such important matters without the wise counsel of the Christian Synods and Classis. We hope by the next meeting of coetus to receive your fatherly advice, and also to give you farther information concerning the condition of Maryland."

We can find no record of the ordination of Mr. Schwope, but it no doubt occurred soon afterwards, as his name appears in subsequent lists of ministers. How the matter was regarded in Holland is sufficiently evident from the following laconic paragraph in a letter from the "Fathers," dated January 12, 1773:

"Concerning the ordination of Domine Schwop we will say nothing, inasmuch as Maryland does not fall under our jurisdiction; but we would earnestly warn you hereafter not to admit men to the ministry unless they have been properly recommended by us."

For several years the minutes of coetus are burdened with accounts of the troubles in Baltimore. To furnish translations of all would be tedious, without adding clearness to the story. Messrs. Gros and Gobrecht congratulated themselves on having restored peace, but the opposition to Mr. Faber broke out almost immediately afterwards with renewed violence. In the Minutes for 1772 we find the following report, which gives a very good account of the progress of affairs up to that date:

"Concerning the congregation in Baltimore, we regret that we cannot report to the Reverend Fathers that it has been reunited, but, on the contrary, its affairs remain in their former condition. Though the coetus has made many efforts and employed all possible means to make peace, these

efforts have hitherto been without avail. The Reverend Fathers will remember, from our proceedings for 1771, that our conclusion concerning Baltimore was to this effect: that Domine Faber and Domine Schwob should both withdraw; that the meeting-house erected by Mr. Schwob should be used for another purpose, and that public worship should be held only in the church. Inasmuch as it was promised by coetus that if this advice was accepted, the first minister sent over by the Reverend Father, should be assigned them, both parties declared themselves satisfied, and were reconciled in the presence of coetus. Domine Faber left Baltimore immediately, and is now pastor at Taneytown; but Domine Schwob continued to preach to his party in the aforesaid meeting-house, which displeased the congregation to such an extent that they began to make inquiries for a minister to preach to them in the church.

It so happened that last winter Domine Wallauer came to this country, but without recommendation from the Reverend Fathers. When the congregation in Baltimore heard of his arrival, they sent a delegate to bring him to that place, and Wallauer accepted the invitation. At the present coetus both parties appeared—the friends of Mr. Schwob as well as those of Mr. Wallauer—and the latter prayed that Mr. Wallauer might be permitted to become their pastor, presenting a call signed by fifty voting members. Inasmuch as we had been warned against Domine Wallauer by the Reverend Fathers, we could not receive him, and this fact was so stated to the delegates from Baltimore.

As neither party would yield, new propositions of union were presented. The first was that the coetus should refuse to consider the affairs of the church of Baltimore unless both congregations should first unite and submit to coetus, which would then make itself responsible to send them a regular teacher. As this proposition was not adopted, the delegates from the congregation were asked whether they would permit Domine Schwob to preach in the church, but they decidedly answered, No! Then it was represented, to Mr. Schwob that, as there were many other places where he might preach—he ought to withdraw from Baltimore, as otherwise union could not be restored. Mr. Schwob replied that he did not insist on remaining from personal motives; but that his party desired that he should continue to preach for them.

Here we have to report that the brethren of coetus are not of one mind in this matter. Some of them on the ground of a resolution adopted at Reading, express the opinion that the parties will never unite until a perfectly impartial minister is sent to them. Others insist that the party of Mr. Schwob should be supported. To these matters the following questions and answers refer, which were decided by a majority of votes, and are herewith presented to the judgment of the Reverend Fathers:

Ques. 1.—When a congregation chooses a pastor who does not belong to

coetus, without the consent or approval of the same, can it be regarded as standing under the care of coetus, and can coetus give its support to such a congregation?

Answ.—No.

Ques. 2.—Can we recognize individual members of such a congregation who submit to coetus and desire to be supplied with a regular pastor?

Answ.—Yes.

It was afterwards resolved that the church in Baltimore shall be visited by those ministers who reside beyond the Susquehanna river.

As the only ministers whose charges were situated in the region referred to in the last clause were Otterbein and Henop, there can be no doubt as to the constitution of the committee of supply.

An attempt at union had been made previous to the arrival of Mr. Wallauer, by extending a call to Rev. Abraham Blumer, Pastor of the Reformed Church, at Allentown, Pennsylvania, but he declined to accept. After one party had irregularly called Mr. Wallauer, the other extended a call to Mr. Otterbein, concerning which call the latter says in the statement in the church-book to which we have already referred: "A call was made to William Otterbein, who then stood in the Reformed Church in York, but he refused, because of the disorganized condition of the congregation; but, after repeated solicitations, he expressed a willingness to accept, provided the coetus should give its consent."*

Concerning this call, we find the following action in the minutes of the coetus held in Lancaster in 1773:

"Whereas the unfortunate condition of the Baltimore congregation still continues, and one party has extended a call to Domine Otterbein, the inquiry was made, whether it was desirable that Mr. Otterbein should accept the call, and it was resolved, that inasmuch as one party is too greatly prejudiced against Mr. Otterbein, it would be better that some one else should serve the congregation, and if possible seek to reunite it. The elders of both parties then presented a call to Domine Hendel, who received permission from coetus to accept it; and, in case Domine Hendel does not accept, the Baltimore congregation is to have the privilege of calling any other member of coetus."

It should be remembered, in this connection, that, according

* See Lawrence's "History of the United Brethren in Christ," p. 231.

to an undisputed tradition, Hendel and Otterbein were brothers-in-law, and were certainly very intimate friends. No doubt, the action of coetus was taken with the full approbation of Otterbein, if it was not actually suggested by him. The old church, however, refused to ratify the call extended by its delegates to Dr. Hendel, and the seceding party evidently felt itself justified by the action of coetus in renewing their call to Mr. Otterbein, who finally accepted it. The old church protested against this action, and presented testimonials in favor of Mr. Wallauer; but the coetus referred the whole matter to the Synod in Holland, which was, we take it, a good way of laying it indefinitely on the table. At the coetus of Lebanon, in 1775, Otterbein's call to Baltimore was regularly confirmed, and the coetus expressed its satisfaction at learning that "his labors are blest and the opposing party cease from strife." The importance which Mr. Otterbein attached to this action is evident from the fact that, so late as Jan. 1st, 1785, he transcribed it in full in the statement which he then prepared for the records of his congregation.

In all this it would be hard to find evidences of persecution. On the contrary, it is plain that Otterbein possessed the sympathy of coetus, which persistently refused to recognize Wallauer and his congregation, and gave him a kind word as frequently as possible. That he was what would have been called, in later days, "a new-measure man," may have rendered him unpopular with the opposing party, but it seems to have done him no harm in the coetus, some of whose leading members entertained similar sentiments.

Otterbein organized his congregation as a Reformed church. He called it "Evangelical Reformed," which was in those days a proper title. The congregation fully acknowledged the authority of coetus, and was represented in its meetings. In 1778 and 1780 no meeting of coetus was held, in consequence of the disturbed state of the country, but immediately afterwards Mr. Otterbein was in his place. In 1784 the coetus adopted the following resolution: *Resolved*, That, inasmuch as reunion

is not to be expected (in Baltimore), both congregations be retained and recognized as congregations connected with coetus, so long as they remain faithful to the doctrine and customs of the Reformed Church." The statement, so frequently made, that Otterbein's church was, from the beginning, "practically independent," does not, therefore, appear to be supported by adequate evidence.

In 1771 Francis Asbury, the pioneer of American Methodism, arrived in this country. As is well known, he did not propose to establish a separate religious denomination; but in furtherance of the great movement inaugurated by Wesley and his coadjutors, he founded societies whose sole condition of membership was "a desire to flee the wrath to come and be saved from sin." * The sacraments were not administered in these Methodist societies, but the class system was introduced, and some of the "leaders" then appointed subsequently became earnest Methodist ministers.

According to Lawrence,† Mr. Asbury became acquainted with Mr. Schwope, and, through him, with Mr. Otterbein, in 1771, the year of his arrival in this country. It is, however, more probable that, as Mr. Otterbein was in Germany during the greater part of that year, the meeting did not occur until 1772, when the latter was appointed by coetus a member of a committee to supply the church at Baltimore. We can well conceive how great must have been the impression made on Otterbein and Schwope by the intimate acquaintance of such a man as Asbury. Their views of religious truth were very similar, and it was natural that they should agree concerning the methods of its promulgation. Wesley's plan of founding societies and holding class-meetings cannot have been new to Mr. Otterbein. It was based on the old idea of the "*ecclesiola in ecclesia*," which had been familiar to the Reformed people of Germany since the days of Jean de Labadie. In many of the churches of the lower Rhine there were societies whose

* American Cyclopedia—Art. "*Methodism*."

† "History of the United Brethren in Christ," p. 218.

members regarded themselves as having attained a superior degree of spiritual enlightenment, and who frequently met for mutual edification. In many cases these societies accomplished much good, and as the state was careful to preserve the external organization of the church, it was but rarely that they resulted in schism.

What was more natural than that Otterbein and Schwoppe should conceive the idea of introducing the system advocated by Mr. Asbury, with various modifications, into the German Reformed churches? It seemed to furnish an answer to what was then a burning question, especially in Maryland. The lack of ministers was very great, and the people were everywhere clamoring for religious instruction. In Pennsylvania, under the fostering care of the Synod of Holland, the state of affairs was gradually improving; but in Maryland it was deplorable, and sometimes appeared almost hopeless. The only practicable expedient seemed to be to enlist the laity in the work of the church. Otterbein and Schwoppe accordingly organized class-meetings in their respective churches, and appointed "leaders" who were to aid the pastor in promoting the devotion of the Church and in the exercise of proper discipline. Some of these leaders, we know, were ruling elders in the Church. Semi-annual conferences were held, at which reports were presented from the several societies or classes.

All this appears from the minutes of five of these conferences, which have recently been discovered among the congregational records of St. Benjamin's church, near Westminster, Maryland, which is situated in the region which was in those days known as "Pipe Creek." * These minutes begin with what appears to have been the second conference, and end abruptly in 1776. It will be observed that during this period the movement was confined to the Reformed church. It in-

* We are indebted to the Rev. John G. Noss for first directing our attention to these documents, and for completing a copy of them which was begun by the writer of this article.

cluded, we believe, all the Reformed congregations in Maryland, except the First church of Baltimore and Mr. Faber's charge at Taneytown, whose absence it is not necessary to explain. Several churches in Pennsylvania were also represented. The Reformed pastors present, besides Otterbein and Schwope, were Jacob Weimer, of Hagerstown, F. L. Henop, of Frederick, Daniel Wagner, of York, Pa., and William Hendel, of Tulpehocken, Pa.*

Unfortunately the minutes were written by Mr. Schwope, who was not skilful in using the pen. There is, therefore, much monotony and infelicity of style, which must render these documents uninteresting to the general reader. As, however, they have never been published, and certainly possess considerable historical importance, we venture to present the following translation, which has been made as literal as possible:

[1.]

May 29th, 1774.

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

At our meeting at Pipe Creek the following action was taken respecting our several congregations: Concerning the congregation at Baltimore it was resolved that, besides the public meeting on Sunday, the male members shall meet twice a week in two classes, to wit, the class in the upper part of the city on Tuesday evening, and of this class Leonard Herbach is appointed leader; † the other class, of which Henry Weider is leader, meets on Friday evening; the female members are to meet separately, every Tuesday afternoon.

Second. The members at Pipe Creek (*die Peiff-Kricker*) have also formed themselves into two classes; David Schreiber and Michael Hübener are appointed leaders of the first, and Uhly Aeckler and Hans Fischer of the second class. These are to meet every Sunday, and no one is to withdraw without good reason.

Third. The members at Sam's Creek (*die Säm's Kricker*) are to constitute a single class. Adam Lehman and Martin Cassel are appointed leaders; they are also to hold their meetings on Sunday.

Fourth. The members at Fredericktown (*die Friedrichstowner*) have

* We have examined the signatures of these ministers, as attached to the minutes of the meeting held in Oct. 1774, and can vouch for their authenticity.

† The German word is *Aufseher*, which might be more literally rendered "superintendent" or "overseer."

organized but one class; they are to meet on Sunday evening, and propose to elect a leader for themselves.

Fifth. The members at Antietam (*die Antitemer*) are to meet every Sunday, in two classes. George Adam Gueding and Samuel Becker are appointed leaders. They are to meet alternately at the church and at Conrad Schnäbeli's, or wherever else the leaders may direct.

The ground and object of these meetings is to be, that those thus united may encourage each other, pray and sing in unison, and watch over each other's conduct. At these meetings they are to be especially careful to see to it that family worship is regularly maintained; all those who are thus united are to take heed that no disturbances occur among them, and that the affairs of the congregations be conducted and managed in an orderly manner.

Resolved to meet again on the first Sunday in October at D. Schreiber's. Done on the date above mentioned.

W. OTTERBEIN.

[2.]

B. SWOPE.

October 2, 1776.

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

At our meeting at David Schreibers, at Pipe Creek, the following action was taken concerning our several congregations:

First. In the previously mentioned congregations everything remains as at first arranged without any change.

Second. Several friends in Canawaken * have agreed to hold meetings, but no leader has yet been appointed. They are to meet every Sunday, and it is determined that they shall be visited from time to time by one of the undersigned ministers.

Third. The friends in Sharpsburg have formed a union (*haben sich vereinigt*). Mr. Stein (?), the schoolmaster, is appointed their leader. Further arrangements are to be made at the earliest opportunity by Benedict Schwob and Mr. Weimer.

Fourth. The friends in Funkstown and Hagerstown are to be visited and organized (like the above congregations) by the aforesaid ministers.

Fifth. Resolved to meet next year in Frederick, on the first Sunday after Pentecost.

Done on the date aforesaid.

W. OTTERBEIN.

W. HENDEL.

JACOB WEIMER.

FRIEDERICH LUD. HENOP.

DANIEL WAGNER.

BENEDICT SWOPE.

* Conewago, i. e., Christ church, Adams co., Pa.

[3.] Fredericktown, June 12, 1775.

In the name of our blessed Lord. Amen :

We, William Otterbein, William Hendel, Frederick Henop, Jacob Weimer, Daniel Wagner, and Benedict Swope, have met in this town, according to the resolution passed at our meeting held last October at Pipe Creek, and after due examination the following was found to be the condition of the congregations or classes :

First. The friends in this town are at peace, and continue their private meetings twice a week, besides regularly attending the service in the church.

Second. The friends at Pipe Creek are equally prosperous, appear serious in their conduct, and, it is hoped, derive a blessing from their meetings.

Third. Those at Sam's Creek are at peace and appear serious.

Fourth. Those at Antietam are again at peace, after a slight disturbance, and meet on Sundays.

Fifth. Those at Baltimore are at peace ; but it is to be feared and guarded against, that with their good order and regular meetings, they do not take the appearance for the reality.

Sixth. Those at Sharpsburg remain in their previous condition. They hold meetings. There is no reason to imagine evil, but it might be wished that their condition was more prosperous.

Seventh. Those at Funkstown number only a few families, and as they live close together, they meet according to their convenience. At this place progress is very desirable.

Eighth. The friends at Canawaken (who were mentioned at our last meeting at Pipe Creek) continue to meet on Sunday, besides going regularly to church, as is our universal order. We have reason to hope for good results.

Ninth. Certain friends in Hagerstown were interested, but none of them have come to our present meeting. We hope the Lord will kindle among them a flame of love and holy zeal.

Tenth. Resolved, that our next meeting be held at Baltimore, on Sunday, Oct. 15th.

Finally. We observe that since our first meeting, which is now more than a year ago, no disturbance has arisen in any one of the aforesaid classes and congregations (except a little trouble at Antietam, which has been covered up with the mantle of charity). In this may be seen the fruits of good discipline, in that at least three hundred souls have remained so long at peace, and we hope in the blessing of the Lord, and may doubtless be preserved in this condition. We hope and desire that the Lord, the merciful, would daily add to their numbers.

Written and done on the date aforesaid, by order of the United Ministers,
by

BENEDICT SCHWOB, *Secretary.*

[4.]

Baltimore town, October 15th, 1775.

In Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

We, William Otterbein, William Hendel, Frederick Lud. Henop, Daniel Waggoner, and Benedict Schwob have met again, in this town, in accordance with the resolution adopted at our last meeting, in Fredericktown, on the 12th of June last.

First. The friends in this town are at peace; they observe the former regulations, and there is no change.

Second. The friends in Frederick continue in their former state of prosperity; so also the class at P. Kemp's (?). Both have increased in numbers.

Third. The friends at Sam's Creek continue at peace as previously. Friend Conrad Dotterer has been appointed leader instead of Martin Cas-sel who lives too far away.

Fourth. The friends at Antietam are at peace, and hold meetings according to our rules.

Fifth. Those at Sharpsburg are at peace, and conduct themselves in accordance with the general rules of their meetings. It is well. Hopes of increase.

Sixth. Those at Funkstown are at peace and meet weekly.

Seventh. Those at Hagerstown are at peace and meet every Sunday.

Eighth. The friends at Canawaken meet every Sunday and are at peace.

Ninth. The friends at Great Pipe Creek* are thus far at peace, (some troubles in the Stein family excepted).

Tenth. The friends at Little Pipe Creek† are in perfect peace, and we trust enjoy a blessing. Both classes at the Pipe Creeks meet every Sunday and still have their first leaders.

Eleventh. Several friends in Germantown‡ have made application, and are to be served.

Twelfth. Resolved, That our next meeting be held in Hagerstown on the first Sunday after Pentecost.

BENEDICT SCHWOB, *Scriba.*

[5.]

June 2d, 1776, John Ranger's.

In Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

We, William Otterbein, William Händel, Daniel Wagener, Jacob Weimert, and Benedict Schwob, have held another meeting, according to the resolution adopted at our last meeting, held at Baltimore, on the 15th of October last.

* St. Mary's Church, Silver Run, Maryland.

† St. Benjamin's Church near Westminster.

‡ Manchester, Maryland, was formerly called Germantown.

First. The friends in Baltimore are prosperous and meet as formerly. The congregation has, however, been considerably weakened by disturbances caused by the war.

Second. The friends in Fredericktown are prosperous and at peace, and have increased in numbers. The class at P. Kemp's (?) is not so prosperous. Steiner and Studel leaders.

Third. The friends at Sam's Creek are prosperous.

Fourth. The friends at the Antietam continue at peace and are prosperous.

Fifth. The friends in Sharpsburg were for some time careless, but have now become more active.

Sixth. Those at Funkstown and Hagerstown have united. (George Arnold leader).

Seventh. Those at Canawaken are prosperous and serious.

Eighth. Those at Great Pipe Creek are prosperous and at peace. Leaders, Jost Maurer and Jacob Cassel.

Ninth. Those at Little Pipe Creek are prosperous.

Tenth. Beaver Dam. The friends are united and meet every Sunday.

Eleventh. At Peter Reitenauer's the friends meet every Sunday. Peter Reitenauer leader.

Twelfth. Germantown is to be further supplied.

Thirteenth. On Sunday, October 20th, we will meet again in Canawaken, at Jacob Wilt's.

BENEDICT SCHWOB, *Scriba.*

Here the record abruptly ends, and we do not know if the meeting at Jacob Wilt's was ever held. As Mr. Schwobe's name does not appear in the minutes of the coetus after this date, we are inclined to believe that he died about this time.* If the minutes of subsequent meetings were kept, they must have been recorded elsewhere. There are, so far as we know, no extant documents, bearing on the progress of this religious movement, between 1776 and 1789.

It appears more than probable that soon after the former date peculiarities of doctrine and worship began to appear which

* In the accounts of the earliest recognized conferences of the "United Brethren," held in 1789 and 1791, as given by Lawrence, Schwobe is mentioned among the absentees. If these statements are based on cotemporary documents they indicate that he was then still living; but, if so, it is strange that he should not have been present on these occasions.

greatly affected the character of the "unity." The conferences instituted by the "united ministers" soon became "great meetings" of the type with which we are familiar from the early history of Methodism. Among those who became most profoundly interested were men who were not connected with the Reformed Church, and who had no intention of becoming identified with it. It was evident that a new type of church life was in process of development, and most of the ministers and members of the Reformed Church therefore gradually withdrew from the organization. This process was no doubt facilitated by the fact that during the latter part of the Revolution the meetings were interrupted by the disturbed state of the country.

Otterbein evidently regarded the subject in a somewhat different light. Like Zinzendorf, when he founded the "Congregation of God in the Spirit," he seems to have imagined that Christians of various denominations might participate in a higher unity without renouncing their original ecclesiastical relations. He, therefore, continued to take interest in the movement which he had helped to inaugurate, but at the same time was careful to remain in regular standing in the coetus of the Reformed Church. He also remained favorable to the Methodists, and in 1784 assisted Dr. Coke in the ordination of Mr. Asbury. In the same year he was present at the coetus held at Lancaster, Pa., and in 1785 was excused on account of a missionary journey which he had undertaken to the vacant churches of Virginia. These facts enable us to form an idea of the peculiar position occupied by Mr. Otterbein.

The relations of the two Reformed churches at Baltimore appear to have gradually become more pleasant. In 1779 Mr. Wallauer resigned, and under a succession of faithful pastors the First Church, which had previously been regarded as schismatic, became thoroughly attached to the Church, as it has continued to be down to the present day. When this congregation proceeded to erect a new church, in 1796, Mr. Otterbein preached both at the laying of the corner-stone and at the

consecration. This shows that by this time the discussions between the congregations must have in great measure subsided. In 1797 the Reformed ministers of Baltimore were both present at the meeting of coetus held in York, Pa., and it was then officially declared that "peace and harmony prevailed in all the congregations." It does not appear that Mr. Otterbein's church in Baltimore increased very rapidly, for in 1791 he reported to coetus that the church numbered sixty members, and that during the year he had baptized twenty-four and confirmed twelve persons. We take it for granted that he spent much time in itinerant labors, and that his congregation was accordingly less prosperous than it might otherwise have been.

There is a tradition that at a great meeting held in the barn of Isaac Long, in Lancaster county, Otterbein met for the first time Martin Boehm, who had hitherto labored principally among the Mennonites. Boehm, it is said, preached with such eloquence that Otterbein embraced him before he took his seat, and exclaimed: "We are Brethren!" From this expression the name "United Brethren" is said to be derived.

We have no reason to question the historic occurrence of this dramatic event. The two men must have been brought together in some way, or they would not have so cordially co-operated at the "first regular" conference of the "United Brethren" in 1789. To embrace a fellow-laborer under such circumstances was, of course, much more natural to a demonstrative German than it would be to an American of the present generation, but we venture to suggest that there is a great difference between fraternal recognition and organic union. If the former only was involved this famous meeting may have occurred at an early date, but if it is held to mark the beginning of practical co-operation, it must, we think, have occurred after the withdrawal of the Reformed ministers, as Boehm's name does not appear in the minutes of their meetings. It is from Boehm, and several of his associates who were also of Mennonite extraction, that the denominational peculiarities of the "United Brethren" are held to be principally derived.

Among the class-leaders appointed in 1774 appears the name of George Adam Gueting, of Antietam. He was we believe the only one of the "leaders" who subsequently became an ordained minister. As he exerted an influence on the movement under consideration not inferior to that of Otterbein or Boehm, a brief sketch of his career may not be inappropriate.

GEORGE ADAM GUETING (born 1741; died 1812,) was a native of Nassau, Germany, who had emigrated to America in his eighteenth year. Though not an educated man he was by no means ignorant, and when Otterbein met him he was teaching school somewhere on the Antietam. After his appointment as class-leader he at first read sermons to the people, but subsequently developed extraordinary talent as an *ex tempore* speaker. Otterbein became his warm personal friend, and probably instructed him in Theology. The date of his ordination we have not been able to ascertain, but the act was performed by Hendel and Otterbein, under the direction of coetus.* He was present, with Otterbein, at the meeting of coetus held in Lancaster in 1791, and then affixed his signature to the minutes. It seems, however, that his heart was not in the Reformed Church. He was an enthusiast of the most pronounced type, whose preaching was attended by the extraordinary excitement so characteristic of earlier days. Under his auspices were chiefly held the "great meetings" on the Antietam, which are not yet entirely forgotten. In this respect, we believe, he went further than Mr. Otterbein, whose disposition was more quiet and reflective.

Mr. Gueting was present at Synod in 1794 and 1797, but subsequently sent excuses. In 1798 Mr. Hinsch complained that he "was making encroachments on his congregations," and it was resolved "that Mr. Gueting should be written to in reference to this matter." In 1802, when Mr. Gueting's usual excuse for absence was presented, it was resolved, that "a friendly and brotherly letter be written to him, and that he therein be urged by all means to attend the next annual meet-

* Lawrence, I., p. 182,

ing of Synod." He failed to respond to this invitation, and in 1804 complaints were preferred against him for disorderly conduct. Finally, he was excluded from Synod by a vote of twenty to seventeen. A note was however added to this action, stating that he might "at any time be restored on giving evidence of true reformation."

This is the entire action of the Reformed Synod in the case of Mr. Gueting, which has so frequently been represented as a series of persecutions. It is difficult to see how, with proper self-respect, the Synod could have acted otherwise, and we can hardly resist the conclusion that Gueting expected this action and did not desire it to be different. He continued to labor in the way which pleased him best, and his memory is greatly cherished in the church of the "United Brethren."

Otterbein attended but a single conference of the "Brethren" after the exclusion of Gueting from the Reformed Synod. This was in 1805, after which date, it is said, he withdrew from the active work. It is true that he was advanced in years, but as he continued in charge of his congregation until his death, which occurred in 1813, eight years later, this suggestion as to the cause of his absence is not entirely satisfactory. Is it not at least possible that after the Synod had spoken in the case of Gueting, he felt that he could no longer attend these conferences without placing himself in a position of antagonism to the body to which he owed his first allegiance? There can, however, be no doubt that he was warmly attached to the men with whom he had labored, and that the latter to the end regarded him with unlimited veneration. Popularly the "Brethren" were still known as "New Reformed"; but Otterbein must have foreseen that a new denomination was unavoidable, and one of his last official acts was to assist in giving it a settled ministry by the rite of ordination. Thus he sent it forth with his benediction, but preferred to remain in the church of his fathers. It will be remembered that J. D. Aurand, Henry Hiestand, Thomas Winters, and

perhaps others, who had participated in the early conferences, also finally determined to remain in the Reformed church, of which they became worthy and efficient ministers. Winters says in his autobiography: "During this time" (between 1809 and 1815) "I was strongly urged to go into the organization of a new church, called the 'United Brethren of Christ, which was then in process of formation, and which did actually come into being; but like the great Otterbein whom I greatly loved and esteemed for his piety and talents, I preferred rather to live and die in the Reformed church."

There can be no doubt that Mr. Otterbein continued a regular member of the Reformed Synod until the end of his life. He attended its meeting held in Baltimore in 1806, one year after he was present for the last time at a conference of the "Brethren," and his name was always retained on the roll of its members. In August, 1812, he said to the Rev. Isaac Gerhart: "I too am a member of the Synod of the German Reformed church; but cannot attend on account of old age." * He was at that time eighty-six years old.

It would be useless to reiterate the testimony of the younger Dr. Hendel, and others, on this subject, as it has been given in full by Dr. Harbaugh. We may add that a part, at least, of Otterbein's correspondence with Rev. J. H. Fries has been preserved, and that a letter inviting Fries to preach in his church in Baltimore is at present in the possession of the writer of this article. † In brief, according to the unanimous testimony of aged ministers who were his cotemporaries—with some of whom the writer enjoyed the privilege of conversing, many years ago—the standing of Mr. Otterbein, as a regular member of the Reformed Synod, was, during his life-time never called into question. His congregation was, however, so thoroughly permeated by the spirit of the movement in which its pastor had at one time been actively engaged, that after his death it became possible to alienate it from the church to which it rightfully belonged.

* Harbaugh's "Lives of the Fathers," II, p. 69.

† *Ibid*, p. 68.

With reference to the personal excellence of Mr. Otterbein there can be no difference of opinion. Even those who differed from him with respect to the methods which he pursued were impressed by his unaffected piety and attracted by his benevolent disposition. We have however formed the conclusion that his doctrinal views were somewhat vague, and that he failed to appreciate the full importance of ecclesiastical organization and order.

Our chief object has been to place on record certain documents which cast a new light on an interesting religious movement. It has thus been incidentally shown that at least in its earlier stages, Mr. Otterbein was more completely in accord with his church than has been generally supposed, enjoying the full co-operation of several of its leading ministers. That he occasionally encountered opposition is not unlikely, but we cannot find a trace of persecution. On the contrary it is evident that he was treated by the Synod with the utmost kindness and consideration, and that to the end of his life he remained in full communion with the Reformed Church.

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